

## **Strategies for Establishing a State School Food Safety Program**

The nation's 119,000 schools are critical sites for preventing foodborne illness in the United States, because 1) more than 95% of young people aged 5–17 years are enrolled in schools, 2) schools are an ideal setting for educating the nation's 53 million young people about food safety, and 3) a great deal of eating takes place in school (i.e., more than 33 million school meals are served daily, in addition to snacks, foods brought from home, and food served at school-related events). Because schools are the only institutions that can reach nearly all youth, they are in a unique position to improve both the education and health status of young people throughout the nation.

CDC has identified eight key strategies for states to adopt in addressing food safety in schools. Following is a description of those strategies, along with suggested action steps that states can implement in support of the strategies.

### **1. Monitor school food safety policies and programs at the state level.**

- a. Develop an inventory of all school food safety related activities, materials, resources, and professional development opportunities currently being used to identify gaps and areas for improvement.

### **2. Establish and maintain dedicated program-management and administrative-support systems at the state level.**

- a. Designate a person to coordinate state-level, food-safe school activities.
- b. Integrate statewide efforts to reduce and manage outbreaks of school-related foodborne illness.

**3. Build effective partnerships among state-level governmental and nongovernmental agencies and organizations.**

- a. Assemble a multidisciplinary team with representatives from the state departments of education, health, and agriculture; state professional organizations; industry associations; and other nongovernmental organizations to develop strategies and a collaborative action plan for ensuring food safety in schools.
- b. Encourage schools to partner with local health and cooperative extension agencies to implement food-safe school programs.

**4. Establish food safety policies to help local schools effectively implement strategies to prevent foodborne illness.**

- a. Develop and disseminate sample policies and procedures for school food safety.
- b. Develop and disseminate a sample protocol for identifying and reporting students and staff with foodborne illness to the health department.
- c. Develop and disseminate a model crisis response plan for foodborne outbreaks.

**5. Establish technical-assistance and resource plans that will provide local school districts with the help they need to implement strategies to prevent foodborne illness.**

- a. Provide appropriate resources, tools, and technical assistance strategies to assist schools in implementing a school food safety program.
- b. Develop strategies for ensuring that school bathrooms and cafeterias are accessible, clean, safe, and well stocked during school and school-sponsored events.
- c. c. Encourage schools to maintain a school environment that fosters student and staff hand hygiene practices to prevent foodborne illness and other infectious diseases.

**6. Implement health communication strategies to inform decision makers and the public about the role of school health programs in preventing foodborne illness.**

- a. Develop and implement a communication plan and education policies to inform decision makers about the importance of preventing foodborne illness in schools.

**7. Develop a professional development plan for school officials and others responsible for establishing policies and programs to prevent foodborne illness.**

- a. Encourage school staff to participate in professional development/continuing education on school food safety.
- b. Train local education and health agency staff on how to assess current school food safety practices, and develop and implement an action plan for improving food safety.

**8. Establish a system for evaluating and continuously improving state and local school food safety programs.**

- a. Develop and implement a plan for measuring successful implementation of food-safe school programs and policies at the state and local levels.
- b. Assess existing state data on outbreak and risk of school-related foodborne illness to establish a baseline, and then regularly monitor efforts to increase food safety in schools.

More information about these strategies will be found in CDC's forthcoming *Food-Safe Schools Action Guide: Using the Coordinated School Health Framework for Foodborne Illness Prevention*. This tool, to be published in 2004, will assist school administrators, nurses, teachers, students, and their families, as well as local health agencies and cooperative extension programs, in establishing food-safe schools.

**Related Link**

- National Coalition for Food-Safe Schools <http://www.FoodSafeSchools.org>